Nixon conduct is ripped by typical citizen

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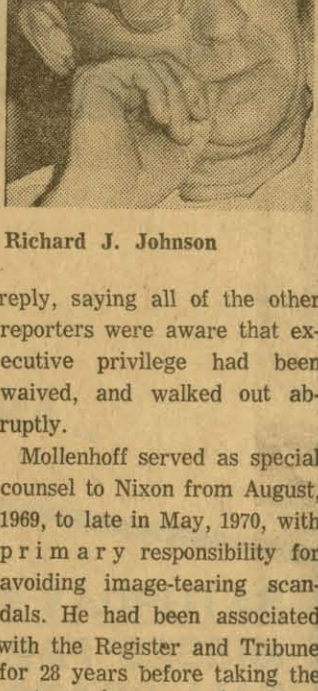
By James O. Jackson



Richard J. Johnson

THE MAN who holds the title of Typical Middle American watched the President's press conference last night and came away dissatisfied with the answers and shocked at the performance.

"From what I saw and heard, I still don't think the man was correct in everything he did," said Richard J. Johnson, 44, of Rolling Meadows, a steel company credit manager who was named "Typical Middle American" in 1972 by the National Public Affairs Center for Television. The center produced two Public Broadcasting System [PBS] shows on Johnson and his family.

Johnson, who regards his views as average even tho he has grown weary of being called "Mr. Average," said he did not get all the information he wanted from the press conference, and said he believes the President went too far in his assault on the press.

HE SAID it appeared the President lost his composure at the end of the press conference.

"It was pretty shocking, the way it wound up," Johnson said. "I was really amazed the thing would end like that. I thought there would be a little more grace and protocol."

Johnson said there were questions left unanswered. "Like, why the sudden change on releasing the tapes? I was hoping to hear that question answered. Why did he hang onto them so long, and then suddenly decide to release them? He didn't make that clear to me, not at all."

He said he was disappointed that the press conference broke up in the midst of the verbal battle between the President and reporter Clark Mollenhoff.

MOLLENHOFF, Washington bureau chief of the Des Moines Register and Tribune, asked the President if he could explain the rationale of a law-and-order administration covering up evidence in the Watergate affair.

The President gave a short reply, saying all of the other reporters were aware that executive privilege had been waived, and walked out abruptly.

Mollenhoff served as special counsel to Nixon from August, 1969, to late in May, 1970, with primary responsibility for avoiding image-tearing scandals. He had been associated with the Register and Tribune for 28 years before taking the post, serving as an investigative reporter and winning the Pulitzer prize.

Johnson said he thought the President harmed himself in his attack on the press, particularly in his remarks concerning television.

"THE COMMENT he made about "respect' really bothered a lot of people there," he said. "I thought it was uncalled for, to come out openly like that, because . . . the gap is not being bridged, it's getting wider." He referred to Nixon's remark that he had no respect for some television commentators.

Johnson said the flareup with Mollenhoff should have been expected by the President and he should have dealt with it more gracefully.

"The President contradicted himself there at the end, when he just cut it short and left," Johnson said. "He had made that comment earlier, where he said the tougher the fight, the cooler he gets.

"Well, the battle got pretty hot there, and away he went."